Blog
Spirituality



Outside with my community: Kiara, left, and Ana, center (Provided photo)



by Celine Reinoso

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Editor's note: *Notes from the Field includes reports from young people volunteering in ministries of Catholic sisters. A partnership with Catholic Volunteer Network, the project began in the summer of 2015. This is our 11th round of bloggers: Celine Reinoso is a Loretto Volunteer in El Paso, Texas, and Maria Longo is a Notre Dame AmeriCorps volunteer in the Bronx, New York.*

For a few years now, I have been chasing what I thought was God's calling.

Being raised Catholic, I understand how important spirituality is in a person's life. I have seen how closely connected it can be to one's passions and interests, like for my mother, and how it can be a driving force in one's vocation or career, like for my theologian friends. I thought coming to the U.S.-Mexico border and learning about impacted communities here was a sure way to get closer to God, but actually, I have never felt more disconnected from my religion and faith in God.

I don't mean that I have lost all belief or that I identify as anything along the lines of "atheist," but I don't necessarily have the same understanding or end goal to my spiritual journey as I once did.

When I was in college, I experienced my first shift in my spirituality that actually brought me closer to the Christian God and Scripture. Learning about stories of Jesus and how he was an advocate for the poor helped me in my decision to apply for a service program. I felt connected to those biblical stories of selflessness, empathy and human dignity. I wanted to understand Jesus and his life in a deeper way through my own acts of service to others. Going on my ninth month of doing volunteer work along the border, I have definitely witnessed real-life stories of selflessness, empathy and human dignity, but rarely did they bring me to Jesus.

Instead, I have found faith through my relationships with people, often in nonreligious or non-Catholic settings. I feel a connection to a higher power and a sense of purpose because of humanity and people's capacity for good, not necessarily because of a book written thousands of years ago. During my involvement in campus ministry in college, I studied that book because I thought it would answer all my big questions and bring peace to my life. I didn't realize it at the time, but it wasn't actually doctrine and religion that I felt peace in, but the people I met through them. Similarly, during my service year, I haven't felt that level of support and comfort in a pew at church, but in my living room, surrounded by my

intentional community.

For some reason, I had been led to misunderstand spirituality. I was hyperfocused on the literal, Christian interpretation of "spirit," i.e., God and the Holy Ghost, and failed to acknowledge the connection of spirituality of human beings. I had forgotten I had been taught that Jesus was both human and divine.

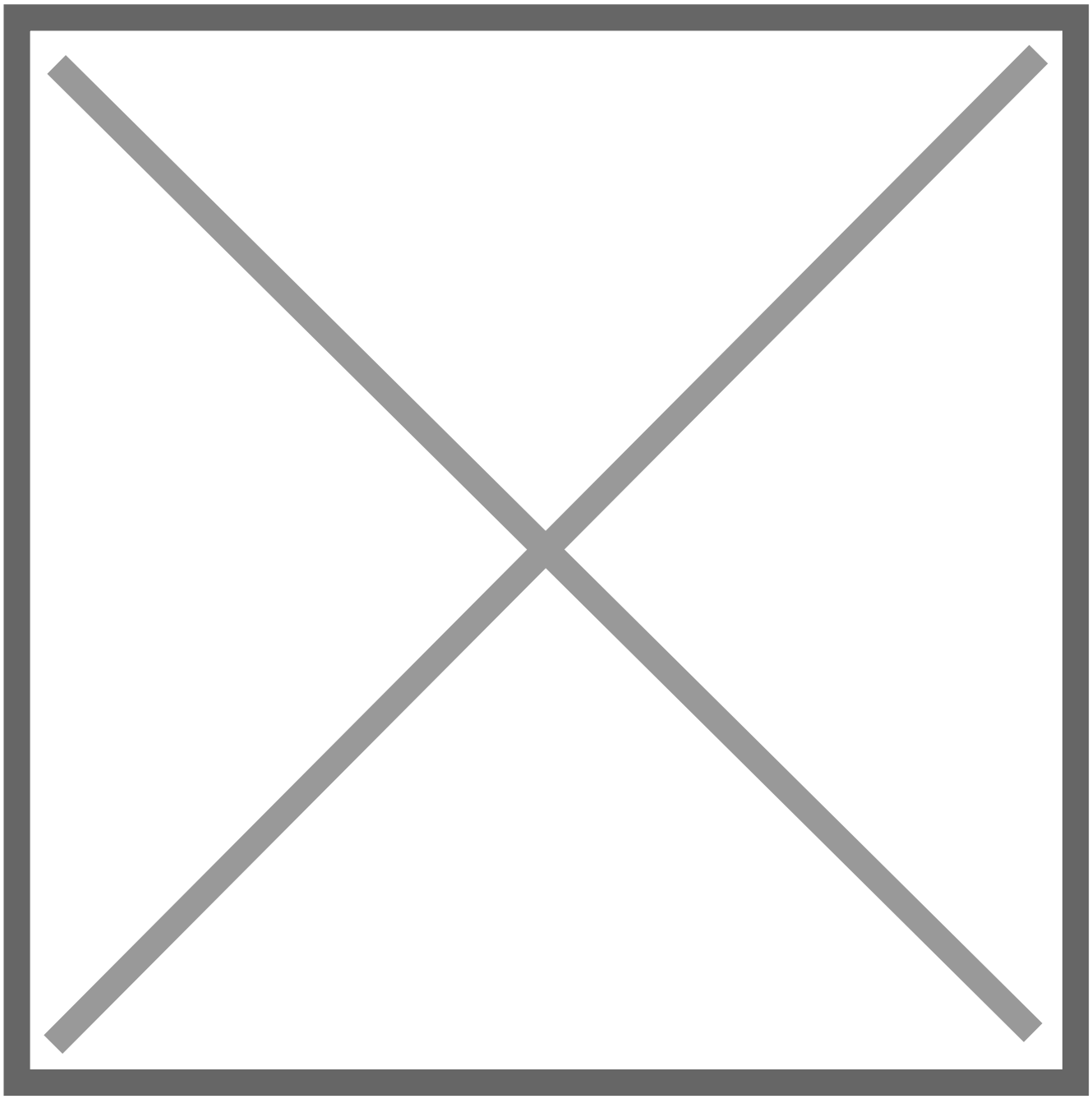
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My program's four core values are social justice, community, simple living and spirituality. While all four spoke to me in my discernment to join the Loretto Volunteers, I was especially motivated to grow in my spirituality. Nine months later, I strangely feel so displaced in my faith, yet so at peace.

Catholicism was and still is intertwined with my culture and family traditions, and for a long time, it felt wrong to stray from the church. In some ways, I feel lost because religion was an integral part of my upbringing and interest in social justice. But now that I can work through ways I have internalized my Catholic guilt, I feel free to experience spirituality in any form.

Those forms, for me, are through people and nature. My renewed spiritual journey entails a discovery of my soul and transcendent purpose. I find support on this journey in my community, friends, mentors and even strangers. And sometimes, I find answers to my questions on my sunset walks admiring the mountains.

I realized I was unable to explore my personal faith in isolation. I asked big questions, often in the form of prayer, and never understood the answers God gave me. I read Scripture as a guidebook to my life, but I felt like I was following a path I didn't desire. Through human connection and witnessing lived experiences, I learned of different interpretations of life and human purpose, which I struggled to find in the Bible. I now find myself eager to listen to people's personal understanding and expressions of faith to lead me to my own.



The border wall in Rio Bosque Wetlands Park in Socorro, Texas (Celine Reinoso)

A person I rely on is Native American scientist and author Robin Wall Kimmerer. Her book *Braiding Sweetgrass* has taught me much about spirituality through "indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants," taken from the full title of her book. Her words have helped me explore myself and my spirituality because she believes in the reciprocal relationship between humans and nature.

"The land knows you, even when you are lost," she writes in *Braiding Sweetgrass*.

I find comfort in her steady faith in nature, how she grounds big questions and the unknown in something so constant, stable and real — the Earth.

As my definition of spirituality and how I seek answers to my questions has changed, I expect it to keep evolving throughout my life. Right now, these practices lead me to a reliance on earthly beings to define my faith. Perhaps the peace I will find here on Earth will help me better understand the spirit world and spiritual beings when I am ready.



Our self-made nondenominational altar at home (Celine Reinoso)

[Celine Reinoso is a Loretto Volunteer in El Paso, Texas, working at Villa Maria, a transitional homeless shelter for women.]

This story appears in the **Notes from the Field** feature series. View the full series.